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The Emergence of Paramilitary Groups in Turkey in 1980

Abstract

This paper will focus on the emergence of paramilitary groups constituted by the Turkish state during the armed conflict between the state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this period four armed groups emerge. Three of these groups (JITEM, Special Police Team and Village Guards) were created by the state. The emergence of the other group (Hizbullah), which was the paramilitary characteristics was not clear. However, it cooperated with the state against the Kurdish civilians. On the basis of secondary literature, interviews with relatives of victims of paramilitary violence, memoirs and court documents I'll suggest that these paramilitary organizations have been established because of three main causes: the 'threat' to the national security of the state; the weakness of institutional capacity of the state; and plausible deniability due to violence to be implemented against civilians during conflicts. Moreover, I'll also argue that the political conditions in which paramilitary groups emerge are defined by the ethnic conflict, the army and party politics of the state, tribal politics of the state, and organized crime.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the establishment of paramilitary organizations formed and used by the Turkish state during the armed conflict between the state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In August 1984 the PKK launched an armed struggle against the Turkish state leading to a full-blown war throughout the 1990s. During the conflict, the state established some new institutions in the ongoing process, with many of them having a paramilitary characteristic. In this period three organizations were established: in the late 1980s in the Kurdish provinces the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism (Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele, Jitem) was established, which included the Repentants (defected members of the PKK); the Police Special Operations Police Units (Polis Özel Harekat Timleri) established in 1982, reorganized 1993; the Village Guards (Köy Korucuları) established in 1924, reorganized in 1985 and 1991 in the Kurdish provinces. In addition to these paramilitary units, the radical Islamist Hizbullah organization that was established in early 1980 in a Kurdish province, Batman, was used against the PKK, especially against Kurdish civilians, between 1991-1995. I argue that the role of these groups during the conflicts of the 1990s as follows: The first three groups were paramilitary forces and the Hizbullah was the 'subcontractor force.' On the basis of secondary literature and interviews with relatives of victims of paramilitary violence on the

establishment of paramilitary forces, I'll suggest that these paramilitary organizations have been established because of three main causes: the 'threatening' the national security of the state; the weakness of the irregular warfare military and institutional capacity of the state; and plausible deniability due to violence to be implemented against civilians during conflicts. Moreover, I'll also argue that the paramilitary groups emerged in political conditions marked by the political demands of the Kurds, the state's military and party politics and tribal politics of the state.

I- Literature on Paramilitarism

How are paramilitary forces defined in the literature? Scholars (Alvarez, 2006; Auyero, 2007; Campbell, 2002; Kalyvas, 2006; Kowalewski, 1991; Mason & Krane, 1989; Mazzei, 2009; Warren, 2000) are using different concepts (vigilante, paramilitarism, militia, death squad) when they try to define or explain the paramilitary groups. Alvarez explains the connection of the terms: "These paramilitary organizations, often referred to as militias or sometimes as death squads, are frequently implicated in the worst excesses of the regimes" and Kalyvas discusses the same approach to these different kinds of the paramilitary forces (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 107). At the same time, Alvarez separates paramilitary forces from the regular military units by four criteria, together contributing to definition of paramilitaries: "First, modern military organizations tend to be rigidly organized along regimental lines while paramilitaries are usually less formally organized with a looser structure (...) Second, militaries are composed of professionals whereas paramilitaries are made up of amateurs (...) Third, the military also clearly and overtly acts on the authority of the state, while the connection between paramilitaries and the government tends to be much more obscured (...) Fourth and last, paramilitary groups often act for personal gain and profit, while members of the military and police do not generally profit personally from their activities (Alvarez, 2006, pp. 5–6). In addition, Böhmelt and Clayton separate armed groups as pro-government militias (auxiliaries), and paramilitary forces through their links, functions and autonomies with the governments. "Auxiliaries are armed groups somewhat aligned with the state to perform specific security roles, but they are not part of the regular (i.e., army, navy, and air force) military's command-and-control chain. (...) We understand paramilitaries as militarized security units, equipped with (light) military weapons and/or military vehicles, trained and organized under the central government to support or replace regular military forces" (Böhmelt & Clayton, 2018, pp. 203–204).

Another way to define paramilitaries follows in the footsteps of Campbell's description of death squads: "Death squads are clandestine and usually irregular organizations, often paramilitary in nature, which carry out extrajudicial executions and other violent acts (torture, rape, arson, bombing, etc.) against clearly defined individuals or groups of people. Murder is their primary or even sole activity (...) Death squads may be a part of a government strategy of state terrorism (...) Moreover, death squads exist to act outside of the law: by definition, their 'job' is to commit extrajudicial murder" (Campbell, 2002, pp. 1–6). According to Campbell, death squads are particular type of paramilitary forces and they have functions as extrajudicial and deadly violence during the conflicts. Namely, these irregular forces are paramilitary organizations, but they are used for violent acts. Another term to describe

paramilitarism is vigilantism. This notion is used to define a larger social group that has a paramilitary character. Campbell compares the difference between death squads and vigilantism: “The differences between death squads and vigilantism lie in the fact that death squads directly involve the state in addition to other actors, while vigilantism comes primarily at the initiative of private (civil) interests and therefore involves a greater degree of spontaneity!” (Campbell, 2002, p. 2). Also the definition of Kowalewski is more descriptive about state and vigilantism: “Vigilantes, social formations of private citizens to suppress deviance, are commonly employed by political regimes (...) Vigilantes arise out of a generalized public unease about disruption. They represent a spontaneous rising of the masses, which in turn is legitimated and given organizational coherence by regimes” (Kowalewski, 1991, pp. 127–128).

Paramilitary forces ranging from the small group -death squads- to larger groups – vigilante- are used mostly by the state as a tool for murder due to their potential invisibility and the fact that they can operate outside of the law¹ (Campbell, 2002, p. 17). Because these organizations are unlawful and mercenary, have flexible “jobs”, states can often deny their massacres and claim that they are uncontrolled groups with which they do not have a connection. Kalyvas argues that “militias are primarily a political rather than a military institution (...) the primary purpose of militias is ‘population control’ in the conflict area (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 107). And also, Mason and Krane analyse death squad violence sanctioned by the state, as follows: “ ‘Death squad violence’ is repressive violence intended to induce compliance through fear. It may be employed reactively or proactively. Its most critical distinguishing feature is that it is violence sanctioned by the regime, either explicitly through policy pronouncements or implicitly through lack of effort to curtail such acts” (Mason & Krane, 1989, p. 178).

Paramilitary groups are mostly affiliated with governments; however, they are not the same as the army (dealing with the external security of the country), gendarmerie and/or police (which are responsible for internal security). According to above definitions, there are a structural difference between paramilitary forces and the state official military institutions. Paramilitaries are very important; they might be deployed in unexpected places, times, and manners, because they hold a mobile and switchable position (Alvarez, 2006, pp. 4–6).

The paramilitary forces were mainly positioned against civilians who support opposition organizations during the internal conflicts. In addition, the unrest of a social group can also be organized by the state as a paramilitary force. For instance, there was unrest within the Turkish right wing groups against the left and the Kurdish opposition between 1970s and 1990s. The Turkish state then organized these nationalist young groups as paramilitary forces (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014). In the same way, some Kurdish tribes who had problems with the

¹“Modern states have a habit of subcontracting. In certain crisis situations (and here the literature on state violence in general is still very useful), this subcontracting can occur even at the risk of diminishing the states’ legitimacy by violating the law, or by compromising its monopoly on the use of violence.”

PKK were also included into paramilitary groups. However, the history of the establishment and use of paramilitary groups against the opposition groups and Kurds in Turkey is very old.

II- Historical Background of Turkish Paramilitary Forces

The historical development of paramilitarism can be divided into distinct three periods. Firstly, the Hamidian and Committee of Union and Progress - CUP periods during the late Ottoman empire (1890-1918), secondly, the republic/Kemalist period (1923-1950), and finally, the multi-party period (1950s-1980s). The late Ottoman Empire can be divided into two distinct periods in terms of the origin of paramilitary forces. The first period comprises the reign of Abdulhamid II (1876-1908); the best-known paramilitary group during this period was the Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments (Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları) founded in 1891 (Klein, 2011). The second began in 1914 during the reign of the the CUP period, (1908-1918), when the well-known paramilitary group Special Organization (Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa) was founded (Denker, 1997, p. 32). Other Ottoman paramilitary youth organisations that had connections with Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa also existed at this time (Ateş, 2012; Sarısan, 2000, pp. 439–501). In addition, there were other local armed paramilitary forces that also had links with the Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa: including Al-Khamsin (Gaunt, Bet-Şawoce, & Donef, 2006, p. 314), Bejik (Çelik & Dinç, 2015, pp. 121–137), and some other bandits based in the Diyarbakır province. These two armed paramilitary forces were established by Abdulhamid II and the CUP. After the defeat of the Ottoman empire in the First World War in 1918, the CUP (along with Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa) abolished itself, and afterwards former members of the CUP organized a new paramilitary force replacing the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa; the Karakol Cemiyeti (Outpost Society) was one of them (Erik J. Zürcher, 2004, p. 135; Shaw & Shaw, 2002, p. 340). Topal (Lame) Osman, the leader of the notorious local band, was an active paramilitary force during the Ankara government (Şener, 2004, p. 49). He had an important role in suppressing the resistance and in committing political killings in the east and the north east of the empire. After the Koçgiri resistance, he and his gang had a prominent role in the suppression of the Pontus resistance and carried out similar massacres against non-Muslim, especially Greek civilians in 1921 (Yerasimos, 2010, pp. 345–417).

The establishment of the Republic of Turkey was ideologically, economically and politically linked to the paramilitary policies of the late Ottoman period. Almost all of the principles (including ideology, economy and policy) of the new republic had been discussed by the Ottoman intellectuals before and during the CUP reign (Hanioğlu, 1981; Mardin, 1999). The ideology of the state elites after the Balkan War transformed dramatically into Pan-Turkism. The idea of Pan-Turkism between the CUP elites and Turkish intellectuals began to be expressed very clearly (F. Dünder, 2008, pp. 59–60). This idea would also be the source of the ideology of the people who founded the republic. Genocide and massacres of non-Muslim people between 1913-1922 were a result of the homogeneous society idea of the authorities of the Empire and the paramilitary forces were actively used to realize this ideology. The transitional government (in Ankara hükümeti between 1920-1923) consisted of former members of the CUP and the government continued the paramilitary activities and legacies of the empire. Thus, there were cultural, political, economic and military continuities

between these periods on the cadres, institutions and ideology (Erik Jan Zürcher, 1987). When Zürcher describes the periodization of *Modern Turkey* he also emphasizes this continuity; “despite the break-up of the empire in 1918 and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, politically, ideologically and economically, there is a great deal of continuity” (Erik J. Zürcher, 2004, pp. 3–4). From the establishment of the Republic to 1950, Mustafa Kemal and then İsmet İnönü, the first two leaders of the republic, governed the state as a single-party dictatorship (Üngör, 2011, p. 253). The paramilitary policy of the single-party dictatorship period (Republican People's Party, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi-CHP, 1923-1950) was a little different from the previous period. Nevertheless, the CHP followed the paramilitary policy of the earlier period. The paramilitary policy of the new state included similar paramilitary forces, informers and local collaborations (some bandits and members and leaders of local tribes) for intelligence purposes (*Genelkurmay Belgelerinde Kürt İsyanları I*, 1992, pp. 289–310). In addition, some of the tribal regiments, village guard system, local gangs, paramilitary youth organizations were also involved. And these groups were used by the state during the Kurdish revolts in the early Republican period (*Genelkurmay Belgelerinde Kürt İsyanları I*, 1992, pp. 237–262).

It could be argued that the single party dictatorship regime bequeathed its paramilitary policy to the next era. In addition, the main characteristics of the paramilitary forces were usually associated with the regular army, the National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MİT), and NATO, specifically the bureaucracy during the multi-party period. The state took part in the Western Block from the beginning of the Cold War, and became part of NATO, an international military alliance of the Western Bloc. NATO also established a new secret military institution in Turkey, and it was the Tactical Mobilisation Group (Seferberlik Tetkik Kurulu, STK) in 1952 (Ganser, 2005, p. 226). This institution was funded by the United States of America, in order to protect the regime against the Soviet Union/Communism or Eastern Bloc during the Cold War (Söyler, 2013, p. 316). However, the state did not use this institution against only the communists and their supporters, it was also active against many other people living in Turkey, apart from the Turks/Muslims. Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı, TMT (Turkish Resistance Organization) was another important paramilitary force that was founded by the Rauf Denktaş and two friends against Enosis (union with Greece) in Cyprus in 1957 (E. Yalçın, 2016, p. 285). Cyprus had thus become a base for the training of Turkish paramilitaries (Parlar, 2005, p. 244).

Another of the most important paramilitary and vigilante group was the Idealist Youth (Ülkücü Gençlik) organization of the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP in the post-1960s) (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, pp. 158–159). The leader of the MHP Alparslan Türkeş and his friends organized commando training camps for members of the youth organizations in 28 different places in the country between 1968 and 1970 (*Ülkücü komando kampları*, 1997). According to Türkeş, these camps were established to fight communists (S. Yalçın & Yurdakul, 2004, p. 25). There were generally three kinds of training in the camp: ideological education (predominantly rules of Islam and Turkish nationalism), fight training (such as karate, judo), and military training (preventing rallies and use of weapons). Approximately 2000 young people were trained by retired extreme right-wing

officers in these camps, who were usually members of the MHP or were close associates of Alparslan Türkeş (*Ülkücü komando kampları*, 1997). These training camps were later transformed into Idealist Hearths (*Ülkü Ocakları*). There were many other Turkish-Islamic right wing student paramilitary and vigilante organizations in existence, particularly between 1960 and 1980. Some of them were the Association for Fighting Communism in Turkey, (Türkiye Komünizmle Mücadele Derneği, TKMD) (Meşe, 2013); The National Turkish Students Union (Milli Türk Talebe Birliği, MTTB, 1916-1980) (Okutan, 2004); and Association of Incursionists (Akıncılar Derneği), (Bulut, 1997, pp. 384–385; Çakır, 1990, pp. 169–170; Çiçek, 2017).

The state military, paramilitary institutions, and youth organization of the right-wing parties mostly moved together against the ‘threats perception’ of the state. The right extremist and radical Islamic youth paramilitary and vigilante groups had a prominent role in the rise of violent acts (for example, individual assassinations, massacres, pogroms) especially during the 1970s (Bora & Can, 1991, pp. 51–100; Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, pp. 175–321; Özgür Açılım, 2011). In the 1970s, leftist groups, trade unions, Kurdish organizations, and the Alevi community provided significant progress in terms of organization. The 1970s were one of the most intense periods of modern Turkey history in terms of the use of paramilitary groups. The responsibility of thousands of murders between 1975 and 1980 has not yet been solved. The generation trained in the commando camps of the MHP became an important instrument in terms of the increase of the violence since the 1970s. After the military coup of 12 September 1980, the paramilitary youth group was used in Europe against Armenian organizations and the PKK (C. Dündar & Kazdağlı, 2013, p. 29). Many of them became involved in organized crime and part of the mafia during the 1980s. These ultranationalist paramilitaries were included in special police teams against the PKK after the 1980s (C. Dündar & Kazdağlı, 2013, p. 32). Paramilitary groups associated with right-wing nationalist parties, some tribes in the village guard system were also dealing with the mafia, and were seen as responsible for the many organized crimes. Importantly, the pro-government Kurdish tribes had been inactive since the early republic period were reactivated by the state against the Kurdish opposition in the late 1970s. These tribes would be a very powerful paramilitary force in the 1990s, especially under the village guards.

III- Emergence of Paramilitary Forces in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s

The topic of this section is the establishment of paramilitary forces in Turkey in the 1980s. In this period four important organizations were established: in the late 1980s in the Kurdish provinces the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism (Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele, Jitem) was established, which included the Repentants (İtirafçılar); the Special Police Team (Polis Özel Harekat Timleri) (1982, reorganized 1993); the Village guards (1924, reorganized in 1985 and 1991 in the Kurdish provinces); and Hizbullah² (early

²Hüseyin Velioglu who took part in radical Islamic youth organizations in the second part of the 1970s established an organization for the religious and Islamic purposes in Batman and Diyarbakır. The meeting places of this organization were the bookstores (such as İlim Kitabevi). Velioglu and his friends went to Iran several times for training. Later, the group would be called Hizbullah. The organization launched a war against the PKK between 1991 and 1995. It was completely different from Hezbollah in Lebanon, just their name was the same.

1980 in Batman, according to several sources Hizbullah was not established by the state (Çakır, 2011; M. Kurt, 2015), but during the 1990s it fought against the PKK). The question I will answer is how and why these paramilitary organizations were established?

I suggest that these paramilitary organizations have been established because of three main causes as I above mentioned: first, the 'threat perception' of national security of Turkish state; second, weakness of the state and lack of the irregular warfare capacity of the state institution; third, plausible deniability due to actions to be used against civilians during conflicts. In addition, I will use the concept of state rather than regime or government. I have argued that the role of governments in the state administration was not determinant in the Turkish state because of the network of hidden relations called 'deep state'. Distinguishing between causes and conditions, firstly I will try to explain the reasons why the paramilitaries were actually set up. Afterward, I will analyse the conditions of the political, military and economic environment that feed them. And I'd argue that the several conditions were the priority. These conditions resulted in both small scale informal groups and large-scale hierarchically ordered organizations. Some of these organizations were an extension of the secret services, others of the army and of organized crime; they were active in different regions, while also the nature of their main actions varied from vigilantes to death squads. First of all, I will examine the causes for the emergence of paramilitary organizations in the literature and then I will discuss the conditions of ethnic conflict, nationalist politics of the state, tribal politics and organized crime. Afterwards, I will discuss the similarities and differences between Jitem (including the Repentants), the Special Action Police Units, the Village guards and Hizbullah as paramilitary organizations.

Discussions on the Emergence of Paramilitary Groups

Why and how did paramilitary organizations emerge? There is a considerable literature on the establishment of paramilitary groups from different conflict and war zones of the world. They display a variety of reasons for the establishment of paramilitary forces. But there are three recurrent explanations; the paramilitary groups are said to be established in support of the official armed forces in their struggle against internal enemies (Campbell, 2002; Kowalewski, 1991; Mazzei, 2009); the paramilitary groups are said to emerge when the capacity of core institution is too limited to sustain the continued existence of the state (Jentzsch et al., 2015; Mason & Krane, 1989; Mazzei, 2009); and, one of the reasons of formation of the paramilitary groups is related to plausible deniability (Carey & Mitchell, 2017; Ron, 2002). These three reasons will enable us to explain the formation of paramilitary groups in Turkey.

Paramilitary groups are usually established when opposition movements rise, however, these groups are largely used against civilians who support opposition movements. Several authors(Alpkaya, Altıntaş, Sevdiren, & Ataktürk Sevimli, 2014; Campbell, 2002; G. Kurt, 2014) argue that an important reason for the establishment of the paramilitary forces is the threats to the national security by armed opposition forces. What exactly do threats mean? The rise of armed and unarmed opposition groups in the country is considered as threats perception due to the national security by the state. The rise of guerrilla warfare of the PKK

in Turkey and the response of the state constitute an important example: The Turkish National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu, MGK, in English: NSC) redefines periodically the organizations, ethnic and religious groups that threaten national security (Bezci & Öztan, 2016, p. 165; Bozarslan, 2014, pp. 152–155). The NSC defines its internal and external threats in the National Security Policy Document (Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Belgesi) known as 'The Red Book' and sets policies accordingly (Bayramoğlu, 2004, pp. 89–92). Therefore, according to the NSC, the internal threat to the security of the state is that the class, ethnic or religious armed and unarmed groups do not accept state authority in the state-controlled lands. Accordingly, it can be said that this institution, in which officers were predominant, played an important role in the administration of the state in the 1990s.³

According to Jentzsch, Kalyvas and Schubiger: "pro-government militias, which only constitute a subset of this type of armed group, were present in 81 percent of all country-years affected by civil war between 1981 and 2007" (Jentzsch et al., 2015, p. 756). Also, Campbell argues that although some states maintain the monopoly of violence, they establish death squads as subcontractors to which the use of violence is delegated in order to suppress armed opposition movements, without the liability of being accused of war crimes or human right violations (Campbell, 2002, p. 17). Moreover, according to Tilly, the relationship between the state authorities and the bandits and pirates was very important during the formation of modern states. The bureaucrats of modern states have benefited from these groups either in wars or in times of internal problems. Therefore, the influence of this relationship played an important role in the emergence of modern states, which were later organized as nation states (Tilly, 1985). Both modern Western states and the Ottoman Empire (kings and sultans) cooperated with the bandit and local gangs when rebels against their authority appeared (Barkey, 1994; Klein, 2011). Today, opposition movements' rebellions against the governments are identified as 'threat to national security.' When opposition movements arise, two kinds of relations appear between unofficial armed groups and state institutions: when the threats against 'the national security' begin, on the one side, the states cooperate with existing state-sponsored armed groups, on the other side, it creates new groups of similar characteristics. In the case of Turkey, both apply. Therefore, it can be said that in situations where internal oppositions have risen, the state has established paramilitaries as an important deterrent instrument.

Another discussion for the emergence of paramilitary organizations is the weakness of the state. According to Hironaka, the lack of an autonomous, rationalized bureaucratic structure; of military capability; of territorial control, and of cohesion and organization of the

³ "The number and weight of senior commanders participating in the NSC also increased at the expense of civilian members. (...) The concrete decisions of the council cover an unprecedented spectrum: determining the curriculum in schools; regulating television stations' broadcasting hours; abolishing the penal immunity of members of parliament from the (Kurdish) Democracy Party; closing down certain prisons and television stations; making bureaucratic appointments of the ministry of public works in the southeast; postponing the termination date of military service for current conscripts; suggesting the formation of electoral alignments between political parties before the March 27, 1994, local election; stating the substance of the laws on terror and capital punishment; and offering Arabic as an elective subject in secondary schools." (Cizre Sakallıoğlu, 1997, pp. 157–158).

opposition are the characteristic features of the weak state (Hironaka, 2009, pp. 69–80). In this case, paramilitary groups can be formed to respond to civilians who support the insurgency against the state, and to compensate for the lack of military means. Besides, the use of paramilitary groups compensates for the lack of economic means of the state. In comparison to regular armed forces militias [are] cheap instruments for the projection of state power (Jentzsch et al., 2015, p. 764). While discussing the reasons for the establishment of global paramilitary forces, Jasmin Hristov emphasizes two points about the relationship between the weakness of the state and the emergence of paramilitary powers: “1) the paramilitary as a logical outcome of a weak state; 2) the paramilitary as a criminal actor that is a product of a weak state” (Hristov, 2014, p. 46). Consequently, due to the weakness of the democratic capacity of state institutions, the weak state has significant internal conflict potential (the weakness of the state's democratic capacity was the preventing of the parliamentary works frequently due to the military coups; the inability to represent social differences in the parliament; the obstruction of the work of non-governmental organizations, etc.). However, the discussion of 'weak state' can only partly explain the emergence of paramilitary groups. Because this debate cannot sufficiently analyse the establishment and use of paramilitary groups by 'strong states'. The fundamental lack of debate is here. Nevertheless, weak states, especially because of the lack of the military capacity, can establish and use paramilitary groups.

Plausible deniability is one of the basic concepts in discussions about the emergence of the paramilitary groups. Carey and Mitchell argue that pro-government militias have usually two categories: semi-official and informal (Carey & Mitchell, 2017, p. 130). The fact that paramilitary groups have semi-formal or informal relations with the state increases the deniability in terms of the consequences of their actions. “One way to establish deniability is to have the killing organized and done by people who are not formally or officially associated with the state” said Campbell (Campbell, 2002, p. 6). Moreover, according to Wolpin, states establish death squads against the leftist and ethnic opposition movements, and one of the most important features of these forces is deniability (Wolpin, 1992). Therefore, the denial of the actions of paramilitary groups is used as an important tool to eliminate opponents without modifying the legal boundaries of the state.

Discussions on the Establishment of the Paramilitary Groups in Turkey

The origin of paramilitary groups active in Turkey in the 1990s is generally traced to the 1970s. There are different reasons for the establishment of these groups. As mentioned above, I would argue that the causes of the emergence of the paramilitary groups are also explanatory points for the example of Turkey: it can be said that one of the main reasons is the security policy/ideology of the state, in other words, the threats to the state: and both external (Soviet or communist threat), and internal (communist movements and Kurdish leftist and nationalist movements) (Özar, Uçarlar, & Aytar, 2013). These threats were ideologically and politically determined by the NSC. Communism was perceived as a ‘threat’ was due to NATO membership and ideological reasons, while Kurdish movements were perceived as threat due to ideological and political reasons. Another important reason is that weakness of the state or shortcomings of the military and irregular warfare capacity of the

state. Although there are many factors that led to the establishment of paramilitary groups in Turkey, particularly towards the 1990s, internal threats to the state, weakness of the state and plausible deniability can be expressed as the most important of these.

As above mentioned in the historical background, the paramilitary groups in the late Ottoman and the republican periods, have been largely established by the state during the emergence of internal opposition movements. Similar conditions exist for groups established during the republic and particularly after the 1970s. According to Aydın and Taşkın the extreme nationalist right-wing paramilitary youth groups founded in the 1970s had been actively mobilized to protect the state from the dissident movements next to the official armed forces (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, p. 284). This nationalist youth groups were connected with the intelligence and paramilitary groups affiliated to the government and military. In the 1970s, the leftist movements were the priority in terms of threats against the state, thereby, they became the primary target of paramilitaries: “political violence reached unprecedented levels in the late 1970s, as the MHP developed into a paramilitary organization with its ‘modern bandits’ recruited from the Grey Wolves and the massacres as well as unknown assailant murders by the ÖHD and MİT rose dramatically” said Söyler (Söyler, 2015, p. 200). Afterwards, the state's internal threat perception changed because of the launched guerrilla warfare of the PKK, and since 1984, the NSC began seeing the PKK as the biggest ethnic internal ‘threat’. However, high-ranking officers have much discussed the lack of the military capacity of security forces against the guerrilla warfare in the interviews and their memoirs (Bilâ, 2007; Kışlalı, 1996; Kundakçı, 2004). Because Turkish army was a conventional army, the military institutional capacity of the state was updated in terms of non-conventional warfare, and this restructuring process continued from 1991 to 1993. The new concept of the war was expressed as a ‘low-intensity war’ doctrine and many formal and informal paramilitary groups reorganized and emerged during this period (Balta Paker & Akça, 2013, pp. 16–17).

The rise of opposition groups against the state was also very important in terms of appearance of the military, bureaucratic and democratic capacity of the state. In Turkey, especially in the Kurdistan, one of the most important reasons for the emergence of paramilitary groups was the weak state structure alongside a threat-perception by the state. Also, here, the weakness of the state is not a global definition. It is used to define the lack of Turkey's political and military capabilities and to emphasize its role in the emergence of paramilitaries. The weak state in the case of Turkey (particularly in the Kurdish provinces) also means the fragmentation of state institutions that materializes with the lack of economic and political capacity and the autonomous structure of the military (Aknur, 2012; Cizre Sakallıoğlu, 1997; Heper & Keyman, 2012). The weakness of the state was also related to its fragmentation in the institutional aspect. In 1950, Turkey was evolving from a single-party to a multi-party system (Karpas, 2015; Vanderlippe, 2006). However, the army continued to dominate politics until the 2000s (Cizre Sakallıoğlu, 1997). Hence, this fragmented and double-headed administration prevented the development of the democratic capacity of the state. According to Aknur, “the regime changes that have taken place every ten years as a result of military interventions, and the shocking levels of political corruption, coupled with

poor economic performance throughout the 1970s and 1990s, have also contributed to Turkey's weak state structure" (Aknur, 2012, p. 421). This was also a process that prevented the consolidation of the democracy, civil society and the multi-party system. In addition, Balta Paker and Akça argue that the establishment of the paramilitary groups (especially village guards) in Turkey was caused by the internal threat to the state; although paramilitary groups were established due to threats to the state, the role of local micro power relations was also very important. According to the authors, "central capacity and decisions of the state may not always be parallel with its local capacity and practices" (Balta Paker & Akça, 2013, p. 9); the Turkish state is not a monolith, especially in the Kurdish issue, and should be analysed through different central and local political actors (Kurdish tribes may also be included in these local powers). Hence, the weakness of the state and the lack of its military capacity led to the formation of paramilitary groups jointly with pro-state local micro-power networks in the Kurdish provinces.

Deniability can also be regarded as a very important reason for the Turkish state to establish paramilitary groups (Biner, 2006; Söyler, 2015). The most well-known death squad used by the state in Kurdish provinces was the Jitem in the 1990s (Göral, Işık, & Kaya, 2013; Özar et al., 2013; van Bruinessen, 1996). In addition, the actions of this state-affiliated group were discussed in many parliamentary research commissions and cases (Işık, 2014; *Ülkemizin Çeşitli Yörelerinde İşlenmiş Faili Meçhul Siyasal Cinayetler Konusunda Meclis Araştırma Komisyonu*, 1995). But government officials still denied this death squad (Söyler, 2015, p. 166). Denial of the existence of the Jitem led to impunity for their actions. In addition to these causes, which help to explain the advent of paramilitary forces, other factors also played an important role. We can list these elements as follows: the government's response to the political demands of the Kurds; the state's military and party politics; the state's tribal politics; the state-affiliated criminal organizations.

Conditions of the Establishment of Paramilitary Organizations in Turkey

Ethnic demands of Kurds provided an important political atmosphere for the establishment and use of paramilitary groups by the state elites. Ethnic conflicts increased globally in the post-Cold War era. Although the ideological framework of the national struggle of the Kurdish political movements emerged during the early republic, it began to be apparent in the late 1960s (Akkaya, 2014). At the same time, ethnic conflict in Turkey was also relevant to the ideological and political transformation of the global context. The ethnicization of political violence was also related to the changing perception of threats (from communism to ethnic conflicts, from class movements to nationalist movements) (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998, p. 424). The conflicts between the Turkish state and the Kurds arose because of the national demands of the Kurds. But the Turkish governments did not accept the claim of a different nation and ethnic group within the Turkish nation state. Especially after 1980, Kurdish people became more ethnically discriminated. Therefore, they initiated an armed struggle and became the main target of the state. Hence the Kurds have begun to be seen as the greatest threat to the state (Dinç, 2008). Also, the state's internal threat perception changed because of the launched guerrilla warfare of the PKK, and the NSC began seeing the PKK as the biggest ethnic internal 'threat' (Balta Paker & Akça, 2013, pp. 16–17). On the other hand, according

to the NSC or the military, Western powers supported the PKK and therefore the NSC emphasized that the PKK was an external-backed domestic threat (Uzgel, 2004). Thus, the redefinition of the enemy/threat, and the atmosphere of conflict has played an important role in the emergence of several new paramilitary organizations.

One of the most fundamental condition in the emergence of paramilitary groups in Turkey was the nationalist policy of the state institutions. Two different institutions that promoted this nationalist policy of the state must be mentioned: First and foremost, the Turkish military; second, the Turkish nationalist parties with different characteristics (Kemalist, right-wing, Islamist, and ultranationalist), those are parties who usually formed government after 1950 (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014). However, in the era of 1960-2000, the army undisputedly dominated the governments and state institutions (Bayramoğlu, 2004). The army was active and autonomous in the state administration and it had created a pressure mechanism for the realization of state politics through military coups and nationalist ideology (Bora, 2004; Bayramoğlu, 2004). The army was at the same time seen as a main actor of the 'deep state' network, which includes some members of the nationalist parties, police, paramilitaries and organized crime. The reason for this illegal network to exist was the lack of the democratic capacity of state institutions (Söyler, 2015; Ünver, 2009). On the other side, the army also showed the political will and preference of the other members of the 'deep state' network. The emergence of paramilitary groups was related to the fragmented structure of the state institutions and a multiplicity of power elites. In addition, although the military dominated Turkish politics, some youth groups -Idealist Youth (Ülkücü Gençlik) and Akıncılar-affiliated with The Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) and The National Salvation Party (Millî Selâmet Partisi, MSP) were formed as paramilitary groups (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, p. 177; Bulut & Faraç, 1999, pp. 50–51). Most of the members of these paramilitary youth groups were positioned in Special Operations Police Units and Hizbullah during the 1990s conflicts. Both, the army and the political parties' nationalist ideologies were one of the main enablers of the emergence of paramilitary organizations from the 1970s to the 1990s.

What was the role of pro-state Kurdish tribes in the formation of paramilitary groups? After the 1980s, the relations established by state institutions with Kurdish tribes played an important role in the emergence of paramilitary organizations in Turkey. The use of pro-state tribes against the threats to the state was not a new policy; during the late Ottoman and Republican period, the state was armed and used some Kurdish tribes that loyal to the state against the non-Muslim communities and the non-pro-state Kurdish population (Klein, 2013; *Genelkurmay Belgelerinde Kürt İsyanları I*, 1992, pp. 237–310). It is necessary to define pro-state tribes: what I mean here are not all members of the tribes, but their leaders and some specific families. The collaboration was a win-win policy, because the pro-state tribes, in exchange, were accepted by the state as political actors. Amid its modernist ideal, the Turkish state played an important role in the reestablishment of traditional relations among the Kurds for pragmatic reasons. The relationship between the different actors in the state authorities and the loyal tribes to the state was one of the important conditions in terms of paramilitary organizations that emerged after 1980. This relationship, which was established with the loyal

Kurdish tribes to the state, would then continue under the village guard system from the middle of the 1980s.

Organized crime is an influential phenomenon in Turkey and Kurdistan: types of organized crime between 1970-2000 were smuggling (especially weapons trafficking), drug trafficking, illegal gambling, racketeering, prostitution and large-scale theft (Bovenkerk & Yeşilgöz, 2000, pp. 223–303). After the 1970s, organized crime and state authorities' relations have dramatically risen in Turkey for several reasons. One of them, the Businessmen who were supporters of the right-wing parties and some units of the police and intelligence agencies, began to economically and militarily support the extreme right gangs against the opposition movements (Gingeras, 2014, p. 218; Bovenkerk & Yeşilgöz, 2000, pp. 242–243). And this situation was legitimizing the right-wing gangs in the eye of government institutions, because they were fighting against common threats. The other reason was the birth of Turkish mafia and the increase in the importance of Turkey in drug trafficking that created enormous economic profits (Gingeras, 2014, pp. 205–238). When the fragmentation of state institutions and the weaknesses of institutional capacities were added to these reasons, some units of the army, members of the political parties and the bureaucracy became part of the organized crime network because of these huge economic benefits and threats of opposition movements. The relations of criminal organizations with state institutions, especially during the conflicts with the PKK, were often discussed. The Susurluk scandal was a turning point in disclosing the relations between criminal organizations and the state (Berberoğlu, 1998; Savaş, 1997).

Discussion

Since the mid-1980s, the PKK or the political demands of the Kurds was regarded as the most important 'threat to the state', because it had initiated an armed struggle against the Turkish state. But the state's security forces did not have a capacity to resist guerrilla movements, because the guerrilla consisted of small-scale units, while the Turkish army still used conventional methods of warfare. About seven years after the PKK began its armed struggle, the Turkish army was reorganized in the context of a low-intensity conflict doctrine. Between 1984 and 1991, the government agencies tried to resolve the lack of capacity of the state institutions by creating various paramilitary forces. Government agencies considered several criteria when they established these paramilitary groups. On the one hand, they created new irregular units in the police and gendarmerie from the ultra-nationalist former members of the Grey Wolves out of whom many were related to organized crime networks. On the other hand, the government established a huge paramilitary organization like the village guards through mostly loyal Kurdish population/tribes. The government agencies aimed to raise the local capacity of the army and police with the first group and to provide the control of the war zone with the second group. The above-mentioned conditions not only prepared the political and military environment for the emergence of paramilitary groups in the 1980s, but also determined the type of irregular groups that emerged.

Throughout this section, I tried to argue that in the beginning of the conflict in 1984, paramilitary organizations with different characteristics were formed as a result of various

conditions. I would argue that the reasons for the emergence of these organizations were the threats of the opposition movements to the state and the weakness of the local capacity of the state institutions and deniability. I also discussed the political, ideological, social, and criminal conditions that contributed to the emergence of these groups in the case of Turkey: First, ethnic polarization, demands and conflict were perceived as the greatest threats to the security of the state and thus, they were some of the most important conditions for the emergence of paramilitary forces. Second, the politics of Turkish nationalism also played a role. The state implements Turkish nationalism as an official ideology through the army and government. This strategy revealed the weakness of the institutional and democratic capacity of the state, deepened social discrimination and led to the emergence of irregular armed groups. Third, when internal threats to the state arose, the loyal Kurdish tribes were used by the state as a local power, due to the weakness of the state's institutional capacity in Kurdistan. This was the case for more than a century. Fourth, criminal organizations, including some members of the state bureaucracy, politicians and the army could be transformed into the subcontractor organizations that the state used for acts when threats arise.

As a result of these conditions, different types of the paramilitary organizations were formed, ranging from the death squads to the auxiliary forces in the second part of the 1980s and early 1990s (Jitem -included the Repentants-, the Special Police Team, the Village guards, and Hizbullah). The formation of some of these paramilitary organizations can be explained with the top-down relation process: The state created or reorganized paramilitary groups when faced with the internal threats. It was existing in the state's memory (archives) and traditions. The Jitem, the Special Police Team, the Village guards can be evaluated in this framework because the state created similar organizations in previous periods. But it may be more illustrative to take advantage of the bottom-up process to understand the relationship between the Hizbullah and the state. Because, the Hizbullah was not similar the previous period's paramilitary groups, which the state had established or benefited. And also, the information that the state accumulated about the Hizbullah was formed over time and with the bottom-up. But in general, I would argue that the formation or activation of paramilitary groups has taken place in top-down process. Therefore, the paramilitary forces were especially established as the first intervention force against the PKK due to the inadequacy of the institutional capacity of the Turkish army and the lack of irregular warfare capabilities. Although the Turkish army changed its conventional structure in 1993 with a low-intensity conflict doctrine, these paramilitary groups did not deactivate during the 1990s. On the contrary, despite these groups were established in the 1980s, they were specially developed and strengthened in the first half of the 1990s. Two paramilitary groups (village guards and special action police unites) are established by law, and the other two (Jitem and Hizbullah) are not legal. I use these concepts of legal and illegal according to the status of these groups in Turkish law. Finally, besides the above-mentioned organizations, it can be said that several informal gangs/organizations appeared because of the fight against the PKK and pro-PKK civilians; the government agencies (army, police, intelligence organization, governorships, etc.) have established many illegal organizations, small and large, in the name of fighting 'terrorism' (Akçura, 2010, p. 139; Şarman, 2007, pp. 41–55).

Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to argue that at the beginning of the conflict in 1984, paramilitary organizations with different characteristics were formed as a result of various conditions. I argued that the reasons for the emergence of these paramilitary formations were the perception that national security of the state is threatened by opposition movements, the weakness of the local military and political capacity of the state institutions, and deniability of the actions implemented against civilians during conflicts. I also discussed the political, ideological, social, and criminal conditions in which these groups have emerged at several moments in the Turkish history.

Considering both the discussions in the literature and the characteristics of the Turkish paramilitary formations, a few points can be emphasized to define the case of Turkey: First, the paramilitary forces appear as hierarchically flexible. Although these armed groups were under the control of the military and police forces, their hierarchy was more flexible. Second, the legal definitions of groups were unclear and complicated. Their legal positions were usually semi-formal or informal. Third, the group members consisted of officers, former militants and well-trained village guards. Although the members of these groups were hierarchically flexible and amateur, most of them were better-trained than the security forces of the state (particularly members of the Jitem and the Police Special Operations Police Units). Fourth, the origin of the members of the paramilitary forces comprised of two separate ideological and political groups: pro-state Kurdish tribes, peasants and artisans, and extreme Turkish nationalist groups. Fifth, deniability is one of the most important characteristics of these groups. A paramilitary group (Jitem) and their many acts are still denied by state institutions. Sixth, the paramilitary groups in Turkey can be classified as having three functions: one was a large informant network, the other was an auxiliary force, and the third was death squads that organized as small gangs. Seventh, the members of the paramilitary groups gained a serious economic income from the war economy, which was provided by the state's salary and fringe benefits, as well as by the blackmail, threat and smuggling networks they created at the local area. Last and most important, these groups were used particularly against Kurdish civilians. Consequently, the state preferred to set up these groups as paramilitary units that were deeply trusted. They were usually semi-formal and informal groups with different characteristics from the regular police and the military institutions; these units were also related to criminal organizations on different levels. These groups that were not independent, but autonomous under the Turkish state control had emerged as the irresponsible, unlawful and dark face of the state used against the opposition during the conflicts. As a result, paramilitary groups are the most important unlawful military instruments used by modern states especially during civil wars.

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